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THE BATTLE OF PRINCETON.

BY SERGEANT R——.

[From *The Phoenix* of March 24, 1832, published at Wellsborough, Pennsylvania.]

“Three or four days after the victory at Trenton, the American army recrossed the Delaware into New Jersey. At this time our troops were in a destitute and deplorable condition. The horses attached to our cannon were without shoes, and when passing over the ice they would slide in every direction, and could advance only by the assistance of the soldiers. Our men too, were without shoes or other comfortable clothing; and as traces of our march towards Princeton, the ground was literally marked with the blood of the soldiers’ feet. Though my own feet did not bleed, they were so sore that their condition was little better. While we were at Trenton, on the last of December, 1776, the time for which I and most of my regiment had enlisted expired. At this trying time General Washington, having now but a little handful of men and many of them new recruits in which he could place but little confidence, ordered our regiment to be paraded, and personally addressed us, urging that we should stay a month longer. He alluded to our recent victory at Trenton; told us that our services were greatly needed, and that we could now do more for our country than we ever could at any future period; and in the most affectionate manner entreated us to stay. The drums beat for volunteers, but not a man turned out. The soldiers worn down with fatigue and privations, had their hearts fixed on home and the comforts of the domestic circle, and it was hard to forego the anticipated pleasures of the society of our dearest friends.

“The General wheeled his horse about, rode in front of

the regiment, and addressing us again said, ‘My brave fellows, you have done all I asked you to do, and more than could be reasonably expected; but your country is at stake, your wives, your houses, and all that you hold dear. You have worn yourselves out with fatigues and hardships, but we know not how to spare you. If you will consent to stay only one month longer, you will render that service to the cause of liberty, and to your country, which you probably never can do under any other circumstances. The present is emphatically the crisis, which is to decide our destiny.’ The drums beat the second time. The soldiers felt the force of the appeal. One said to another, ‘I will remain if you will.’ Others remarked ‘We cannot go home under such circumstances.’ A few stepped forth, and their example was immediately followed by nearly all who were fit for duty in the regiment, amounting to about two hundred volunteers.<sup>1</sup> An officer enquired of the General if these men should be enrolled. He replied,—‘No! men who will volunteer in such a case as this, need no enrolment to keep them to their duty.’

“When we were about commencing our march for Princeton, Lord Cornwallis left that place with the intention of attacking, and at one blow cutting off the rebel army. He appeared near Wood Creek or the Assanpink river, where a skirmish took place at the bridge over the creek. The Hessians were placed in front of the British troops, and endeavored to force the bridge. They retired, and we were left undisturbed for the night.

“Leaving our fires kindled to deceive the enemy, we decamped that night, and by a circuitous route took up our line of march for Princeton. General Mercer commanded the front guard of which the two hundred volunteers composed a part. About sunrise of the 3rd January 1777, reaching the summit of a hill near Princeton, we observed a light-horseman looking towards us, as we view an object when the sun shines directly in our faces. Gen. Mercer ob-

<sup>1</sup> About half of these volunteers were killed in the battle of Princeton or died of the small-pox soon after.

serving him, gave orders to the riflemen who were posted on the right to pick him off. Several made ready, but at that instant he wheeled about, and was out of their reach. Soon after this as we were descending a hill through an orchard, a party of the enemy who were entrenched behind a bank and fence, rose and fired upon us. Their first shot passed over our heads cutting the limbs of the trees under which we were marching. At this moment we were ordered to wheel. As the platoon which I commanded were obeying the order, the corporal who stood at my left shoulder, received a ball and fell dead on the spot. He seemed to bend forward to receive the ball, which might otherwise have ended my life. We formed, advanced, and fired upon the enemy. They retreated eight rods to their packs, which were laid in a line. I advanced to the fence on the opposite side of the ditch which the enemy had just left, fell on one knee and loaded my musket with ball and buckshot. Our fire was most destructive; their ranks grew thin and the victory seemed nearly complete, when the British were reinforced. Many of our brave men had fallen, and we were unable to withstand such superior numbers of fresh troops.

"I soon heard Gen. Mercer command in a tone of distress, 'Retreat!' He was mortally wounded and died shortly after. I looked about for the main body of the army which I could not discover—discharged my musket at part of the enemy, and ran for a piece of wood, at a little distance where I thought I might shelter. At this moment Washington appeared in front of the American army, riding towards those of us who were retreating, and exclaimed 'Parade with us, my brave fellows, there is but a handful of the enemy, and we will have them directly.' I immediately joined the main body, and marched over the ground again.

"O, the barbarity of man! On our retreat, we had left a comrade of ours whose name was Loomis from Lebanon, Ct., whose leg was broken by a musket ball, under a cart in a yard; but on our return he was dead, having received several wounds from a British bayonet. My old associates

were scattered about groaning, dying and dead. One officer who was shot from his horse lay in a hollow place in the ground rolling and writhing in his blood, unconscious of anything around him. The ground was frozen and all the blood which was shed remained on the surface, which added to the horror of this scene of carnage.

“The British were unable to resist this attack, and retreated into the College, where they thought themselves safe. Our army was there in an instant, and cannon were planted before the door, and after two or three discharges, a white flag appeared at the window, and the British surrendered. They were a haughty, crabbed set of men, as they fully exhibited while prisoners, on their march to the country. In this battle, my pack, which was made fast by leather strings, was shot from my back, and with it went what little clothing I had. It was, however, soon replaced by one which had belonged to a British officer, and was well furnished. It was not mine long, for it was stolen shortly afterwards.

“Immediately after the battle an officer observing blood on my clothes said ‘Sergeant R—— you are wounded?’ I replied ‘No,’ as I never expected to be injured in battle. On examination I found the end of my forefinger gone, and bleeding profusely. When and how it happened I never knew; I found also bullet holes in the skirts of my coat, but, excepting the slight wound of my finger, was not injured.

“In this battle and that of Trenton, there was no ardent spirits in the army, and the excitement of rum had nothing to do in obtaining the victories. As I had tried powder and rum on Long Island to promote courage, and engaged here without it, I can say that I was none the less courageous here than there. The Army retreated to Pluckemin mountains. The weather was extremely cold, and we suffered greatly from its severity. We stayed three or four days and then marched through New Jersey towards New York. The inhabitants manifested very different feelings towards us, from those exhibited a few weeks before, and were now

ready to take arms against the British. At Morristown I was sick of the small-pox and many of our little army died there of that disease.

“Such were some of the hardships and self-denials endured in securing the blessings now enjoyed by this free and happy Country. But the old soldiers have been almost forgotten, until they have nearly all gone to their graves. Many never received a cent of compensation for some of the most trying services, as I am sure I never did for the month for which I volunteered.”